

**BUDGET HEARING
TUESDAY, MARCH 22, 2005**

Board of Finance Members Present: Robert K. Pagani-Chairman, Richard J. Cleary, Robert J. Clements, Vaughn E. Gerber, Mark A. Joyse, Barry C. Pinto

Others Present: Dr. Packman-Supt of Schools, D. Roberson-BOE Chmn, T. Littizzio-Dir Bus Svs BOE, M. Blanchette, D. Keune-BOE Members, J. Snyder-Budget Adv Comm, School Principals-B. Ripa, J. Dwyer, F. Milbury, E. Kuba, residents

Chairman Robert Pagani opened the hearing at 7:30 pm.

Board of Education Chairman Dale Roberson began the presentation by stating some facts about the history of Ellington Schools. On February 2, 2005 the Board of Education approved a budget for fiscal year 2005-06 in the amount of \$25,244,655 which is an increase of \$2,071,552 or 8.9% over the current year budget. This budget maintains existing programs, accommodates a growing student population, addresses deficiencies, addresses facilities growth and meets State and Federal mandates. \$956,546 of the increase is for salaries and benefits for existing employees and \$639,000 is for new staff.

Maurice Blanchette stated that a freeze on discretionary spending was implemented on February 11 for the 2004-05 budgets. He stated that they are trying to come in at the end of the year in the black and will probably not have any funds to return to the town. Some of the areas with overruns will be the security officer at the High School, unemployment compensation, property insurance, transportation (2 new kindergarten buses were added) and capital improvements from the High School building project. He also stated that outside tuition and health insurance was running under budget this year which will offset some of these overruns.

Dr. Packman outlined the focus goals for Ellington which is to promote support for education through communication, and to involve staff in curriculum to improve student learning. He stated that the Intermediate Plan of Facility Needs for Ellington would be presented to the Board of Education at their meeting tomorrow night. The Connecticut Mastery Test scores and CAPT scores for Ellington met or exceeded State and surrounding towns. He stated that this is a small part of the total educational system. Ellington is making good use of the funds they are given.

Mr. Blanchette then described the 2005-06 budget increases. Existing salary increase is \$733,265, health benefits have increased 7%, and the Town's MERF contribution has increased from 4.75% to 6.25% which is not reflected in this budget. Transportation increased \$77,417 which includes two new buses for the kindergarten run to Windermere and 2 new BOE vans runs for special education. Fuel Oil increased due to increased usage, not using natural gas and higher prices. The textbook line item shows an increase of \$196,611. This is due to the fact that last year, text book supplies were prepurchased at the end of the prior year; however, there will not be available funds to do this at the end of this fiscal year. This year's budget will purchase k-2 language arts supplies. The equipment budget increased \$19,998, Program Improvements increased \$29,218 and Other increased \$34,045. Outside tuition increased \$38,368 and we are anticipating fewer students enrolling in the Rockville VoAg Program.

Mr. Keune then outlined the enrollment driven staffing requirements. He stated that Ellington is presently #127 in rank for Connecticut. New staffing requirements equal \$353,616 which consists of 1 teacher for Center School, .5 teacher for Crystal Lake, 3 new teachers for High School, and a teacher, a .6 language arts and .5 music teacher for the Middle School. Identified deficiencies equal \$195,944 which includes aides, a guidance counselor at Middle School, kindergarten aides at Center School, a media specialist and additional lead teacher days. There is also a custodian in this category and increased hours for the maintenance secretary, as well as a technology technician and positions required to follow the No Child Left Behind mandate. Special Service requirements of \$90,110 consist of an aide and a .5 special education teacher.

In closing, Chairman Roberson thanked Mr. Clements for attending their budget workshop in January. He stated that he feels this is a modest budget and affords the town quality education. The Board of Education will work to provide the highest educational standards to the Town of Ellington. He feels that this budget maintains existing programs, accommodates growing student population, addresses identified deficiencies, addresses facility growth and meets State and Federal guidelines. The Board of Education will continue to work with the Board of Finance to present this budget to the voters for approval.

Mr. Joyse asked about the utilities. Mr. Littizzio told him that last year they had budgeted to use both heating fuel and natural gas. The natural gas has not been hooked up and is not being used, so that budget looks like it has been reduced. The fuel oil has been increased to reflect the difference.

Mr. Clements asked why the new staffing is budgeted at rate of pay higher than an entry level teacher. Mr. Packman stated that for budgeting purposes they put in a figure for a teacher at a grade level with a masters degree. They cannot always hire an entry level teacher and the competition among school systems is great. This seems to be a good average rate of pay for budget purposes. He asked what lead teacher days were. It was explained that it was a teacher that helps the superintendent before school starts and after the school year ends to set up and close down.

Mr. Cleary asked if there was a policy for replacing older computers. Mr. Roberson stated that the shelf life of a computer is roughly 3 years. For many years there had been a line item in the capital improvements budget for computer replacements. This line item was eliminated due to the technology being replaced through the school projects. It has also been eliminated this year, and Dr. Packman feels the schools can get by one more year. Mr. Pagani stated that perhaps next year the Board of Finance should start funding this item again.

Mr. Pinto asked what some of the other enrollment driven costs were. Mr. Littizzio stated that custodial, supplies, and teachers are all areas that are affected, but that the staffing is the only item that is identified specifically. There is projected to be a 2.5% increase in enrollment.

Mr. Roberson stated that the three new teachers in this budget request for the High School have been requested for the past 3 years. This year they will graduate 153 students and the new freshman class coming in is 207.

Mr. Joyse asked if the redistricting was accomplished in last budget. Dr. Packman stated that they did not redistrict as many students as originally planned and that there is no redistricting in this year's budget. The long term plans facility report that they will be receiving tomorrow night will help to determine where to go with redistricting next year.

Mr. Cleary asked if there was any participation by the Board of Education in the Build Out Plan. He was told that they had received a copy of it, and Mr. Blanchette stated that it was taken into consideration when the facilities study plan was being done.

Mr. Pagani stated that the Board of Finance is looking to fund the Plan of Development this budget year. However he did not feel it would change any school growth. He asked about any anticipated retirements in this budget. He was told that there are a large number of teachers becoming eligible for retirement, but they have not budgeted for any.

Mr. Pagani asked about the production media facility and if a staff member was in the budget for it. Mr. Packman stated that since the facility is not fully completed, they did not budget for it. They feel that if it becomes operable, there are qualified people in the High School as well as the Middle School that could run it temporarily.

Mr. Pagani asked if the Ellington Acres Water Co would be reimbursing the school for the temporary water source they had to purchase during the water contamination problem this winter. He was told that a letter went out from the First Selectman's office, but nothing further that they know of. He asked if any staff was moved to Center School this year, and was told that 3 teachers and some support staff was moved.

Mr. Pagani also asked if the Middle School was to capacity. Maurice Blanchette stated that the Middle School is at 102% capacity and is projected to be at 110% in 7 years. Mr. Littizzio stated he felt there was room to add some classrooms if necessary.

Mr. Pagani stated that the Board of Finance supports the Board of Education and sending a reasonable budget to the taxpayers. He would like to see the budget pass in one referendum. He hopes to see the continued cooperation between the Board of Education and the general government to get the budget passed.

The hearing was closed at 9:15 pm.

Submitted by _____
Lori Smith, Clerk